



*The Historic Gloria Dei Preservation Corporation*  
**FOUNDERS**

*Spring 2020*



*The Perils of the Sea*

# HERE'S WHAT'S INSIDE

Spring 2020



**About the Author:** Michael Schreiber is a writer living in Queen Village. He has served on the Historic Gloria Dei Preservation Corporation board since 2017. Many of his articles on the history of Philadelphia and Early America appear on his website [www.philahistory.org](http://www.philahistory.org).

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**HGDPC**

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## FOUNDERS MAGAZINE

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# A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

By Candace Roberts



Candace Roberts,  
Chair of the Board

Dear Friends,

We've had an exciting year at the Historic Gloria Dei Preservation Corporation (HGDPC). Our fundraising efforts have culminated with the approval of a Keystone Grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This grant is a 50/50 match. You can only get what you are prepared to give. We set a stretch goal of \$65,000 so that we could maximize the grant and restore the buildings most in need.

Why is this project important? The Gloria Dei Church building was erected 1698-1700 by the Swedes, who were among Pennsylvania's first European settlers. "Philadelphia's first neighborhood" was born out of this very community. Over time, four additional buildings were added. Cedar and other local trees were utilized heavily in the construction of these buildings. As these materials decays over time, nearly every wooden surface – from the top of the steeple to the base of each door – is severely damaged today. This project entails patching, repairing, replacing and painting the exterior wooden surfaces on the sanctuary, parish hall, and sexton house, as well as the first-floor interior of the sanctuary.

With a neighborhood grant from Queen Village Neighbors Association for \$3,000, and a successful fundraising campaign within the HGDPC Board, the Gloria Dei Church congregation, and the community, we met our fundraising goal! We will begin the work in the spring of 2020 with expected completion this summer.

In other news, this year we launched our **Great Talks at Gloria Dei** lecture series to wonderful acclaim. Our guest lecturers included our very own Michael Schreiber, whose talk was the basis for this issue of *FOUNDERS*. Attendees also learned about an ongoing project led by Carol W. Smith to digitize the records of Philadelphia's historic congregations. Alex Palma, Assistant Director of Carpenters' Hall, discussed the Carpenters' Company's role in building the religious landscape of colonial and early federal Philadelphia. And, finally, local historians Joel Spivak and Harry Kyriakodis shared stories from their recent publication, "*Underground Philadelphia: From Caves and Canals to Tunnels and Transit*." These events attracted over 200 new visitors to our campus. We thank the lecturers for speaking to our group. We are also grateful to The Jazz Sanctuary for providing live piano music during the receptions that followed each program.

I am also pleased to report that we are hosting six more "Great Talks" in 2020. To learn more about these free events, please visit our website at [www.preserveoldswedes.org/events](http://www.preserveoldswedes.org/events).

To add to our list of accomplishments this year, HGDPC has published the first edition of our **Churchyard Map and Self-Guided Tour**. This comprehensive map shows the locations of all of the gravestones that are visible today. Visitors can reference the alphabetical list of names of the interred on the back of the map, and match those names to plot numbers on the front. This map is available for free in a box mounted at the front of the church. Many thanks to Dr. Paul Grant for funding the printing of this map.

In our first issue of *FOUNDERS*, I let you know that **Christian burials** are now possible in the historic Gloria Dei Churchyard, and that the proceeds would be used to conserve the markers though a fund to be created. I am very pleased to report that the fund is in place and we have nearly \$25,000 raised to date. We have provided strict regulations for the use of the proceeds and the amount of the earnings to be used, with the goal of growing the fund to one million dollars (or more). The Gloria Dei Churchyard is the only churchyard in South Philadelphia where interred ashes can be buried with a standard size marker or monument.

The successes of 2019 will serve us well as we move forward in the coming years. As with any historic preservation organization, we always have our eye on the next project. When this Keystone Grant project is complete, we will be working on replacing the roof of the Church sanctuary.

Turning our attention to this issue of *FOUNDERS*, we continue the stories of our mariners and pirates, and the role of Philadelphia as a major seaport through most of the 18th century up to about 1815. We benefit greatly from the tireless work of our historians, Michael Schreiber, Amy Grant and Jeanette Woehr. I hope you enjoy this issue of *FOUNDERS* and please know we would be delighted to hear your comments. Thank you for your support for HGDPC!

Respectfully submitted,  
Candace Roberts  
Chair of the Board

# PHILADELPHIA'S RICH MARITIME HISTORY

By Michael Schreiber



*This print shows the tremendous amount of commercial activity on Philadelphia's docks at the turn of the 18th century. Arch Street Ferry, Philadelphia by William Birch (1800). Courtesy of The Independence Seaport Museum.*

People sometimes express surprise on learning that Philadelphia used to be the country's major seaport and that a huge percentage of the city's working inhabitants were engaged in maritime-related activities.

The neighborhood of Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church was fully connected to the waterfront until the end of the 1960s, when hundreds of houses and businesses were torn down for the construction of I-95 (then called the Delaware Expressway) and for other poorly conceived reasons. Many of the demolished houses had been lived in for over 200 years, and had been the residences of generations of people associated with the sea — chandlers, rope makers, sail makers, barrel makers, riggers, carvers, ship builders, stevedores, and shipping merchants — as well as the seamen themselves and their families.

Through most of the 18th century and up to about 1815, Philadelphia was the largest port in North America. In the late colonial period, it was probably busier than any British ports except London and Liverpool. After the Revolution, in 1793, total exports from Philadelphia equaled a quarter of the tonnage for

all of the United States, exceeding all of New York and New England put together. On any given day in that era, there were generally well over a hundred ships in port.

Philadelphia was also a major shipbuilding center, due in part to the fine old-growth forests that surrounded the city. One English parliamentarian told the House of Commons in 1784 that the most beautiful ships "are those built in Philadelphia, where this art has attained to the greatest perfection, equal, perhaps superior, to any part of the world."

It might seem curious that Philadelphia became a major port, since the problems in getting here from the open ocean were considerable. For one thing, depending on the winds, it could take four days to a week, or even more, to go up or down the Delaware River to reach the ocean. Moreover, it was the only port south of Canada that was blocked by ice in the winter — sometimes for months on end. And then, ships had to contend with being grounded on the shifting shoals in the Bay and along the river. And finally, the Bay itself was open to storms from the ocean that could dash them onto the shore. There was no refuge

at the mouth of the Delaware Bay until the breakwater was constructed in the 1820s.

But ships and shippers came here by preference because it had the largest concentration of people in English-speaking America, including many with wealth and sophisticated tastes. Therefore, merchants could get higher prices for finished goods than they could in New York.

## THE TRIANGULAR TRADE

The nature of the trade coming in and out of the port during the colonial period, and even during the early republic, reflected what is typically seen in a colonial context. While Pennsylvania had to import almost all its finished goods from England, it exported raw materials. In the very early days of the city, the main exports were furs, skins, and lumber. Later, as the forests were cut down, the major export became wheat grain and milled flour.

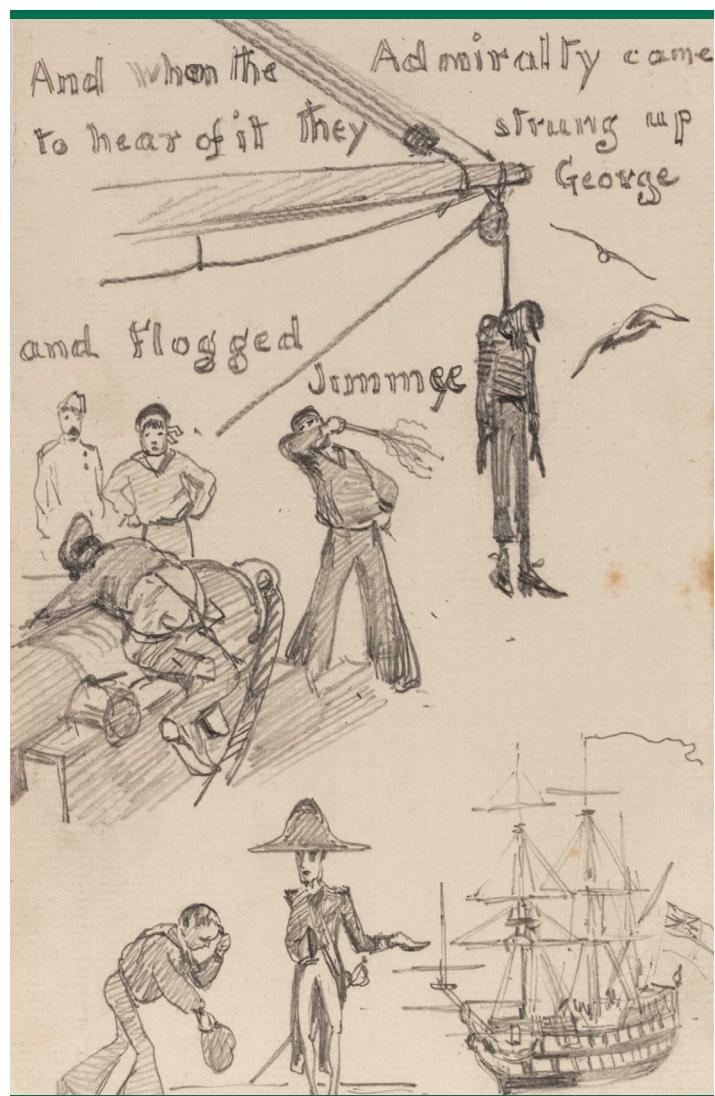
There were three main routes for Philadelphia vessels. The first one was down the coast and to the West Indies, generally exporting flour to the islands in return for sugar, molasses, tropical fruits, coffee, and exotic woods. The second route was to Portugal and Spain, where the ships would pick up oranges, olive oil, cigars, and so on. And the third major route was to England. The route to England had far fewer ships than on the route to the West Indies, but they were the biggest and best vessels — with the most experienced captains — since goods from the mother country were by far the most valuable.

Unfortunately, Britain had tariffs in place to block the main product that Pennsylvania had to offer — wheat flour. And so, merchants had to resort to a triangular trade. They would ship flour to the West Indies or to Portugal in exchange for gold or silver or bills of exchange, which they could then spend in England to purchase finished goods and textiles to carry back to Pennsylvania.

Of course, the more infamous triangular route belonged to the slave trade — flour and other goods to Africa, slaves to the West Indies, and sugar to the North American colonies. However, slaves were never a major commodity in Pennsylvania, since the colony lacked the huge plantations that made slavery highly profitable in the South. People who are in lifetime bondage do not tend to work very efficiently or live very long, so the slave-holders generally required large single-crop plantations worked by many slaves to furnish the profits and lavish lifestyles that they were accustomed to.

The slave trade briefly flourished in the Philadelphia area in the 1760s. That was because the war between Britain and France had produced a shortage of labor when white indentured servants were mustered into the King's army and immigration from Europe tailed off. For example, Joseph Blewer was an important patriot in the American Revolution but also a slave trader in the 1760s (see Spring 2019 issue of *FOUNDERS Magazine*). In July 1765, Blewer carried 70 people from Africa to be sold in Philadelphia on behalf of Willing, Morris & Company, and appears to have transported many others to Barbados for hard labor on the sugar plantations.

When slave auctions were held in Philadelphia, such as the ones in front of the London Coffee House at Front and Market Streets, buyers came from many miles around — including from the large tobacco plantations in Maryland and southern Dela-



*Corporal punishment, here depicted by a British sailor, was widespread. Three small drawings illustrating a cautionary tale about Three Sailors from Bristol by W. L. Wyllie (19th c.).*

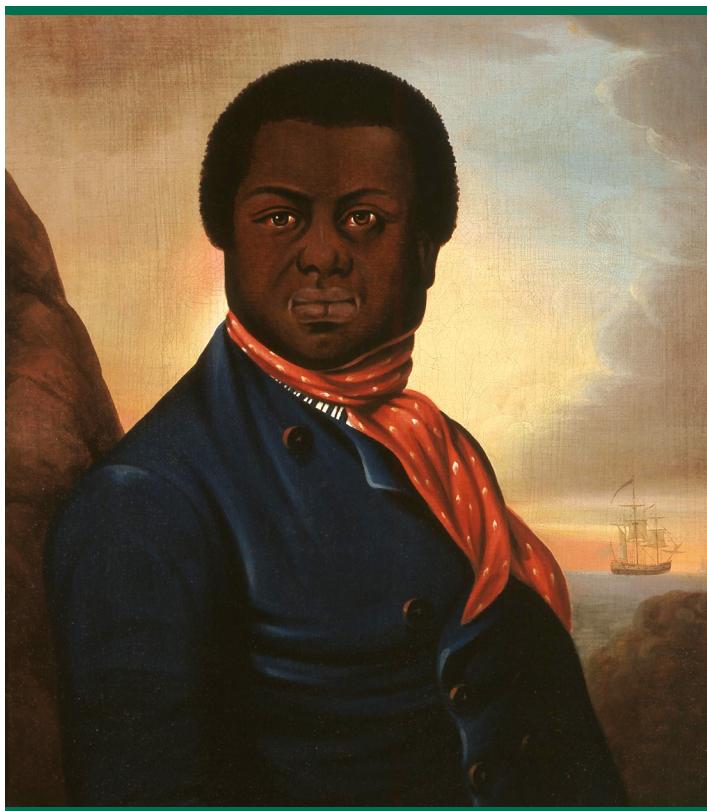
ware. Slave merchants like Willing, Morris & Company even transported likely buyers from Wilmington, Del., free of charge to the auctions.

## LOW PAY, POOR WORKING CONDITIONS

In the late 18th century, mariners were the largest occupational class in Philadelphia — perhaps 20 percent of working men in the city. It is estimated that over 1200 seafarers made Philadelphia their home in the early 1770s, although the exact number is hard to come by since many mariners were too poor to be included on tax rolls, and many were transients, going from port to port to find work.

Research shows that the greater portion of mariners in Philadelphia were not born in this city but came from urban areas in the North American colonies or in Britain or other European countries. They generally came from families on the lower end of the economic spectrum and were not in a good position to take up a trade or, much less, to turn to farming. So they usually went to sea, and braved its dangers, out of sheer economic necessity.

One study analyzed the men who were portrayed on Seamen's Protective Certificates around the year 1800. These certificates were carried by seamen who were U.S. citizens to try



*A number of black men went to sea but, due to discrimination, few were made officers.*  
Portrait of a Black Sailor, artist unknown (c.1880).

to protect them from being kidnapped and impressed into the Royal Navy on the pretense that they could not prove that they were not British subjects. The study found that the subjects remained mariners for only around seven years on average. Many remained at sea just until they could obtain a job on land, where they were not exposed to such extreme dangers and were able to spend more time with their families.

And yet, the pay for an ordinary seaman was fairly low compared to other occupations. Thus, the trade tended to attract many men who were relatively unstable, and who, for reasons such as alcoholism, found it difficult to obtain higher paying jobs.

A British sea captain, writing in 1790, wrote of the difficulty of recruiting crew members in America. They were, he complained, “generally half-drunk, they do not care what trouble they give, and may be justly compared for obstinacy to the wild ass of the wilderness.” The captain went on to say, speaking of conditions in Philadelphia, “The houses they board at and the brothels they frequent here have scarcely any furniture, and are the most filthy places of this description I have ever met with in any country. The sailors’ chests are placed around the room and serve both for seats and beds, and in the summer are the residence of innumerable hosts of flies, which creep into their punch glasses, being attracted by the sugar.”

It was very rare for an ordinary seaman to rise to become a mate or captain. The educational background of most seamen — many could not read or write — did not enable them to master the navigational and business skills that captains needed to possess. Those who did become captains often came from families in which their fathers or uncles were captains, and so they could learn the trade through apprenticeship.

## BLACK SEAFARERS

Many captains preferred to sail with Black or mainly Black crews. They understood that free Black seamen were often more stable, sober, and harder working than whites were. While seafaring was one of the lowest paying jobs for white men, it was more of an upper-income job for Blacks. Since free Black men had much fewer economic and social opportunities on land than the whites did, they tended to stay on the job longer than whites, and worked harder in order to strive to keep their jobs. Many Blacks were given leading positions on ships as able-bodied seamen, but they could only rise so far. The chances that a Black seaman would attain the position of mate or captain was almost non-existent.

Beginning in the late 18th century, and until the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction, large numbers of Black men went to sea — about 20 percent of the workforce. Although the great majority of Black seafarers were free men, slavemasters would not infrequently rent out their human chattel to serve on ships. And sometimes white captains or even ordinary seamen would have their slaves accompany them on board ship, which would allow the owners to pocket the wages.

Moreover, it was not unknown for unscrupulous sea captains to sell free Black crew members into slavery when they visited Southern ports. Also, beginning in South Carolina in 1822, Black seamen were subject to what was called the Negro Seamen’s Acts, which provided for the incarceration of Black mariners in city jails until such time as their ship left port. The law was passed principally because the slaveholders feared that their slaves would be stirred to rebellion by seeing free Black seamen walking the streets. As a consequence, an estimated 10,000 Black seamen were imprisoned under the Negro Seamen’s Acts, until the laws were abolished with the Civil War.

Discipline for seamen of all colors was tight, and sometimes brutal. As one manual, the “Shipmaster’s Assistant and Commercial Digest,” pointed out in 1846, “The contract of a sailor is somewhat military in character. The master is entitled to prompt obedience. To ensure this, strict discipline must be observed, and if his crew fail in their duty, he may resort to force. Any resistance to him, except for the preservation of limb or life, may expose the sailor to the charge of revolt and mutiny. These offenses are punished by a fine not exceeding \$2000, and imprisonment, with hard labour, not exceeding ten years.”

Further, in regard to punishments: “Chastisement must not be a blow with a fist or a stick. The seaman ought to be flogged with a rope, before the crew, who should be at the same time apprised of the offense.”

Of course, bad as flogging and other punishments might have been, an ocean voyage held much greater perils for mariners. Inscriptions on several gravestones at Gloria Dei hint at the tragic fate of some of them, with the words “lost at sea.”

Two hundred years later, it is often difficult to research exactly what happened to these victims of the sea. Sometimes, however, the circumstances of their lives and their deaths can be pieced together from materials such as shipping reports in newspapers, crew lists submitted to the Philadelphia port authorities, and perhaps occasional letters or documents stored away in an archive. On the following pages, you’ll read stories about a few of those mariners who were “lost” and never came home. 

# LOST OFF THE LOUISIANA COAST

By Michael Schreiber

The words “lost at sea” are the most melancholy, and often the most mysterious, inscriptions on gravestones at Gloria Dei (Old Swedes’) church in Philadelphia. In those cases, the stones are merely markers for a person who never came home and never saw their loved ones again. Their lives were cut off suddenly as the victims of a disaster somewhere across the ocean, and their bones lie there still.

The gravestones at Gloria Dei tell us, for example, of Capt. James and Josephine Stewart, husband and wife, who lost their lives together at sea, supposedly in September 1856. James Stewart was the son of Carpenters’ Hall caretakers James and Sarah Stewart (we will tell their story in a future issue of *FOUNDERS Magazine*).

I have tried to investigate where James Jr.’s and Josephine’s fatal event took place, but it took days of searching before a few clues popped up. I found mention of a Capt. James Stewart living in New Orleans in 1855, and a man of the same name commanding the schooner *Ellen* between Baltimore, Richmond, New Orleans, and Havana in 1855 and ’56.

Records of ship departures in the newspapers mention that the schooner *Ellen* left New Orleans on Aug. 8, 1856, bound for Matanzas, Cuba, and carrying a cargo of lard, coal, and empty barrels. With Capt. Stewart were his wife, children, and niece, along with a crew of 15. When the *Ellen* left New Orleans, people there were still unaware that a hurricane had been mounting force in the Gulf and heading quickly for Louisiana. But the *Ellen* sailed straight into it.

At around 10 a.m. on Sunday morning, Aug. 10th, the storm crashed into Last Island, a barrier island on the Louisiana coast that today is mostly underwater. In 1856, a village stood on the island, which was a favorite beach resort for vacationers, including many from New Orleans high society, along with their slaves. On this occasion, the owner of the Ocean House Hotel had brought in a cotillion band from New Orleans, and guests danced, gambled, and partied late into Saturday night. We can imagine that many of them slept late that Sunday, and were surprised at breakfast time to see that a squall seemed to be brewing off the coast. The squall quickly became a gale, and then a raging hurricane, which lashed the island with 150 miles per hour winds.

At first, the winds whipped in from the bay side, from the north, and people on the island moved toward the Gulf shore to escape the flooding water. Then the wind shifted and towering waves battered the island from the Gulf itself. By 4 in the afternoon, water from the bay had met the surf coming in from the Gulf, and the low-lying island was virtually covered with water. The two-story hotel collapsed, crushing entire families beneath its timbers.

About 160 people sheltered in the ferry boat that had been grounded on the bay side of the island — while others tried to hang onto floating driftwood to save their lives. Others held onto the poles of a carousel, which revolved crazily in the wind.



A storm at sea claimed the schooner *Ellen* in 1856.

A few people managed to crawl their way inside a lighthouse that was still standing.

The hurricane battered the area at full strength for an entire day and night. High winds, huge waves, and floating debris demolished every one of the island’s buildings. After the storm had moved inland, practically every sign of the village had been erased; even the foundations of buildings were covered by several feet of sand. At least 198 people were killed on the island, and probably many more if you include the uncounted Black slaves, plus dozens more in ships that foundered in the Gulf and the bay.

One survivor recalled that in the aftermath of the hurricane, as he made his way back to the village, “The jeweled and lily hand of a woman was seen protruding from the sand, and pointing toward Heaven; farther, peered out from the ground, as if looking up to us, the regular features of a beautiful girl who had, no doubt, but a few hours before, blushed at the praise of her own loveliness, and again, the dead bodies of husband and wife, so relatively placed as to show that constant until death did them part; the one had struggled to save the other.”

Ten days later, a boat discovered the remains of the schooner *Ellen* sticking out of the sand of Last Island. Part of her stern was visible, but all hands, plus Captain James Stewart, his wife Josephine, and their family were presumed lost. 

# LOST IN AFRICA

By Michael Schreiber



River Tingalinta, a tributary of the River Nuñez, in the 19th century.  
"Travels in Western Africa in the years 1819-21, from the river Gambia ... to the river Niger" by Major William Gray (1825).

There are several gravestones in the Gloria Dei churchyard that commemorate people who were "lost at sea." Two of these men were apparently lost while on voyages to Africa.

One of them, Capt. Henry Sharp, appeared in the Philadelphia directory of 1810 as a 24-year-old mate, living in a back alley. Later, as a sea captain, he lived on S. Second Street, making frequent voyages to the West Indies and to Africa.

On one voyage, Sharp's mate and four crewmen died while their vessel was in the Rio Ponga, the heart of the slave trade in what is now the country of Ghana. But Sharp was not a slave trader; he returned to Philadelphia with a cargo of beeswax, ivory, palm oil, hides, camwood, and gold. Sharp reported that the colony of relocated former American slaves in Liberia seemed to be thriving, but slave ships were thick along the African coast.

On his final voyage to Africa, Sharp left Philadelphia on the brig *Mary* on Nov. 14, 1835. On New Year's Day, according to later reports in the newspaper, the *Mary* was at the River Gambia and due to sail shortly for the River Nuñez, where it was spotted in March 1836. There was no more word about the *Mary* until May 11, when she had returned to Philadelphia under command of the mate, Bancroft. The mate gave the news that Capt. Sharp had died in Africa — at just about the time of his 50th birthday. But still, how he died is not known.

The answer in similar incidents is often disease; most crew members on trading ships from Europe and America had little resistance to tropical diseases like malaria.

An 1873 U.S. government handbook for ship masters, "The West Coast of Africa: From Cape Spartel to Sierra Leone," cau-

tions its readers: "The climate of the [River] Nuñez is very unhealthy. It is rare for the crews of vessels which have been in the river any time to escape the dangerous fevers, that require 10 days for incubation. The most unhealthy months are November and December, when even the natives suffer from the effects of the climate. It would be better not to enter the river during these months, and never to remain in it longer than necessary. Negroes should always be employed for doing the work of loading, discharging, and boating."

Capt. Robert Rae died three years later at almost the same place where Henry Sharp lost his life — along the River Nuñez.

Rae was not a parishioner at Gloria Dei; his gravestone was originally erected at Ronaldson's Cemetery at 9th and Bainbridge Streets. When Ronaldson's was converted into a city playground in the year 1950, the bodies were removed and most of the stones were destroyed. But a handful of stones were moved to this churchyard in order to memorialize them.

Capt. Robert Rae was one of these people. Although he was not a parishioner at Gloria Dei, he was a close neighbor, having lived for a number of years with his wife Jane on what is now Kenilworth Street. And so, it is appropriate that a monument to him stands in the Gloria Dei churchyard, although his body was never brought home.

How did Rae lose his life? Disease is the most likely answer, but there were other dangers on the African coast, including tensions with the local people, which had been whipped up to a boil from the actions of American and European slave traders.

In 1839, when Capt. Rae made his last voyage on the bark

*Rosalba*, the area around the River Nuñez was in the midst of wars among the local tribes, which was interfering with commercial ship traffic. For example, a few weeks before the *Rosalba* arrived on the coast, a New York ship, the *Transit*, put into the River Nuñez after suffering heavy damage in a hurricane. The captain, Joseph Wise, had been killed in the storm, but the crew was soon to face further dangers.

Newspapers later printed a report by a British naval officer “that the ship *Transit* of New York, in passing down the river Nuñez, had been boarded by people of one of the kings of the country, and robbed of a considerable amount of property, and one man killed belonging to the ship before they surrendered ... The reason the king gave the supercargo of the ship for robbing her was that they had sold powder to his enemies up the river, with whom he was at war, and which enabled them to invade his dominions and make slaves of his people.”

In fact, these conflicts with the native people possibly led to a crucial mistake at the beginning of March 1839, when the *Rosalba* arrived off the River Nuñez to trade for palm oil and gold dust. According to newspaper reports at the time, Capt. Rae took the jolly boat to visit the shore and a large grouping of native people gathered on the beach to receive him. In the meantime, the mate, who had remained aboard, was watching Rae’s progress through his spyglass. He could not tell whether the gathering on the beach was friendly or not. Moreover, he explained later, he had imagined he saw that the boat was upset in the surf. This apparently created some alarm in his mind, which was reinforced when he saw that another boat had been dispatched from the shore to their vessel, bearing a white flag at the end of a pole.

The mate thought it was necessary to escape. He raised the anchor and ordered the *Rosalba* to put to sea. In the meantime, Captain Rae, who was stranded on shore but perfectly unharmed, thought that his mate had led a mutiny. Luckily, there was a fleet of British Navy vessels in the region, which were on the hunt for slave traders. Rae enlisted the help of the British commodore, who delegated four naval vessels to chase the *Rosalba*. Ultimately, they found her, and after the misunderstandings were clarified, Rae took command once again.

Rae then wrote a letter thanking the British ships for aiding him. Tragically, that might have been the last letter that he wrote. By the time it was reprinted in U.S. newspapers several months later, Rae was long dead.

A later letter by the mate, a man named Thomas Bevans, and written in Barbados, informed people back home that Captain Rae had died on April 2, 1839, and that he was buried the next day. The mate’s letter is on file in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and is within a large folder of correspondence, mainly on legal matters related to Robert Rae’s untimely death.

The handwriting in the mate’s letter is extremely difficult to decipher. At the start, he states that Capt. Rae died “after a short ... [illegible] of eight days.” The missing words seem to end with “stress,” so maybe it’s “distress.” It seems quite possible that he is referring to a disease, which lasted eight days, as the cause of Rae’s demise.

Bevans then states that the crew of the *Rosalba* was “suffering much at present.” They were running out of food and were unable to obtain any on shore. “I have got but one bb. of beef and



*Battle of River Nuñez, between Britain and France, 1849.  
"Belgian and French warships during the Rio Nuñez Incident" by Paul Jean Clays (1849).*

but one of pork and bread none. I give the men farina in substitute for bread,” he wrote. He added that the vessel had been unable to land its cargo.

Another letter in the file, by an attorney, made the situation clearer. He wrote, “... the mate said that a civil war was going on among certain of the natives and he was very afraid to land the cargo as it might be subjected to the depredations incident to the unusual disorder which then existed in the country.”

At some point while still on the African coast, the *Rosalba* lost her anchor and cables. After crossing the Atlantic, the barque remained several days in Barbados in order to have those items replaced. She arrived in New York City in late July under Bevans’ command.

The legal matters detailed in the correspondence at the Historical Society had to do with the efforts of Rae’s widow, Jane, to sue Bevans. Robert Rae had owned the *Rosalba*, which they claimed was valued at \$5000, as much as all the items in the rest of his estate put together (two houses at \$2000 each, jewelry \$500, furniture \$458). But now, after a disastrous voyage, the *Rosalba* was up in New York in the hands of other people, while Bevans was demanding extra wages for the time that he was master of the vessel. So Jane Rae wished to recover some money.

The case dragged on for at least three years, and I am not sure how it turned out for Jane Rae. I did read in the Historical Society letters that in the meantime a rich aunt of hers died in northern England, and there was a good chance that she would inherit a lot of money.

As for what happened to Capt. Rae, it does not seem to have been made entirely clear to anyone. His widow’s chief attorney, John Cadwalader, even asked Thomas Buchanan, the governor of Liberia and brother of the future U.S. president, James Buchanan, to try to inquire about the circumstances. Cadwalader wrote about Rae’s family having “a painful feeling of uncertainty, which can only be relieved by some precise and authentic information of the time ... and circumstances of his death. And would be a matter of some consolation if some particulars as to his burial could be added to the information.”

Buchanan wrote back (Sept. 4, 1840) that he would ask some of the British naval officers in the region if they knew anything, but he died exactly a year later on Sept. 3, 1841. Whatever information he learned may have gone with him to his grave.

# PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

By Michael Schreiber



Capt. Charles Sandgran commanded the brig *Mary Becket* in the Caribbean sugar trade in the 1820s. This drawing from "Ten Views in the Island of Antigua" by William Clark depicts enslaved men rolling hogsheads of sugar onto boats (1823).

A gravestone in Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') churchyard in Philadelphia was erected following the death of Sarah (Mitchell) Sandgran, who passed away in May 1860 at the age of 72. Sarah had lived as a widow for 31 years following the untimely and mysterious death of her husband Charles, a sea captain, whom she had married at the church in 1807.<sup>1</sup>

The inscriptions on the stone are now obliterated, but a century ago it was possible to read the terrible pronouncement on Capt. Sandgran's demise: "lost at sea in the year 1829." That is followed by the sentence:

**"The earth and the sea shall give up their dead."**

Accordingly, I have searched for some indication of whether the sea would indeed "give up" the facts of how Capt. Sandgran

lost his life. The historical record has been rather grudging with that information, but we know a bit about Sandgran's battles with the sea through a first-person story about sailing on his vessel, the *Mary Becket*. The story was written by John A. Dahlgren and published under the title "The Fragment" in the *Saturday Evening Post* on Nov. 12, 1825.

Dahlgren's father, Bernard, who was the Swedish consul in Philadelphia, was a congregant at Gloria Dei and was buried in the churchyard — although his body was later moved. Both Sandgran and Bernard Dahlgren were probably close acquaintances; both were born in Sweden. There's a good chance that Sandgran had known young John from childhood.

Soon after his father's death in 1824, 15-year-old John Dahlgren, now an orphan, opted for a life at sea. Indeed, he later became famous as a U.S. Navy admiral during the Civil War and inventor of a type of cannon. Young Dahlgren wrote in his journal, "in order to obtain a knowledge of my intended profession, on the 30th of March, 1825, I embarked 'before the mast' on board the brig 'Mary Beckett,' owned by Lyle and Newman and commanded by Charles Sandgren [sic], bound for Trinidad

<sup>1</sup> Charles Sandgran was the son of John and Botilla Sandgran of Scania, the southernmost province of Sweden (they lived near Malmö). On Nov. 14, 1807, at Gloria Dei, the 26-year-old mariner married Sarah, 20, daughter of carpenter George (1752–1821) and Anne Mitchell (1760–1847), of 243 Swanson St., Philadelphia. In their early years of married life, the young couple lived in Sarah's parents' home on Swanson St. In the 1813 Philadelphia directory, Charles Sandgran, mate, is listed as residing at 272 S. Front St. Sarah's parents still lived with the growing family. Charles' and Sarah's children at the time included Mitchell (1810–1886), Charles M. (ca. 1811–1891), and Anne Botilla (1813–1901). Charles M. and Mitchell went into the plumbing business with their younger brother George (1818–1891).

de Cuba. On the 2nd of April experienced a very severe gale from the N.E., in which several vessels were lost."

"The 23rd May," he continued, "We again set sail from Trinidad for Philadelphia. On the evening of the 29th May, the most severe gale that had ever visited the coast of the United States commenced. It lasted till the 4th of June. Twenty-four hours more, and our fate had been sealed. We were doubling the northwest head of Cuba when it commenced. Not being able to carry any sail, we were drifted by the current on the western coast of Florida, a lee shore. It was that eventful time that suggested 'The Fragment.'"

After he had returned from his voyage to Philadelphia, John Dahlgren was taken in and employed as a helper by Dr. Collin, the pastor of Gloria Dei church, and spent many hours with the old man in the former rectory. To while away the hours, Dahlgren wrote "The Fragment" at that time. Here is a fragment of "The Fragment":

"Too much agitated to retire to my berth, I threw myself on the cabin floor and soon fell asleep, dreaming of the various hardships to which we had been and still were exposed — of our dreadful prospects. I already fancied I felt the shock of the vessel striking, and the cries of the sailors. The shrill whistle of the boatswain rang in my ears. I started from my bed and fancied it a dream, but the hoarse cry of 'All Hands ahoy!' convinced me that it was dreadful reality; I was on deck in a minute.

"The vessel was laying to under a close-reefed main top-sail, and so strong was the gale that it alone was sufficient to heave her on her side; the bleached strip of canvas on the mizzen that was exposed to the wind was just discernible by the steady but feeble light from the battle lanterns on the quarterdeck, and the proud bunting at our peak was fluttering madly amid the blasts.

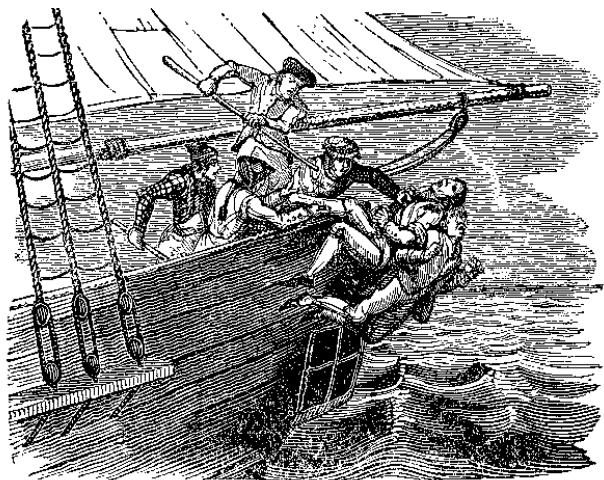
"The commander was standing near the wheel, with a desperate calmness stamped on his features, and with keen interest watching every plunge she made, and then gave his orders to the helmsman, in a low distinct voice, to 'Ease her with the helm.'"

[Later] "... Scarcely had I closed my eyes when the hoarse summons of 'All hands ahoy!' called me on deck again. How different! The moon had just risen, the wind had abated in a great degree, and rendered the loosening of the topsails, fore, and main sail safe, and the orders were accordingly given."

You can imagine that the men and boys had all crawled out onto the yardarms, ready to loosen the sails. The boys, like Dahlgren, were often given the most dangerous jobs, tasked with climbing to the highest reaches of the masts and inching out to the ends of the yardarms since they did not weigh as much as the older men.

"The order of 'ready about' was answered by a general cry of 'Aye, aye, sir,' and hardly had the words of 'Hand-a-lee, fore-sheet, fore-top-bow line, job and stay-sail sheets let go,' issued from the master, before the helm was put hard down, and the gallant ship bore up, and looking in the wind's eye, fell off majestically, as the yards were braced sharp, and bowing down to leeward seemed to fly from the dangerous coast which had so lately threatened us with destruction."

The wise and calming commander in Dahlgren's story, Charles Sandgran, was 45 years old in 1825. He had been carrying sugar and fruits from Trinidad, an old Spanish colonial town on the south coast of Cuba, to Philadelphia for almost 20 years and knew those waters very well.



This drawing from "The Newgate Calendar" depicts the infamous Pirate Roche and his villainous companions throwing their victims overboard (1828).

We know from newspapers of the era that three years later, after spending Christmas Day in Philadelphia with his family, Charles Sandgran sailed on the *Mary Becket* on Dec. 26, 1828, for his usual run to Trinidad de Cuba. Two months later, he was sighted by other mariners at the Cuban port, and all seemed well.

One report was delivered by Capt. Charles Shankland, who had left Philadelphia two weeks earlier than Sandgran on the brig *Harp*. Shankland returned to Philadelphia on March 4, with the brig battered from having weathered a gale. He reported that when he sailed from Trinidad one month earlier (Feb. 5), Sandgran had recently arrived and was unloading his cargo.

Another captain reported to the newspapers that he had left Trinidad on Feb. 28 in tandem with the *Mary Becket*, but he had lost sight of the other brig in the vicinity of Cape Corrientes, in the far southwest corner of Cuba. That is the last mention I can find of Sandgran and the *Mary Becket*. In looking at the ship manifests at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, neither the *Mary Becket* nor her captain ever appear again.

One of the seamen on board the *Mary Becket* does appear in the port of Philadelphia on a later voyage, however. That was one of Charles Shankland's brothers, Robert, who shipped out on another vessel later in March 1829. Another brother, Benjamin Shankland, the first mate on the *Mary Becket*, does not appear in any ship manifests on file at the Historical Society, but we know that he survived because he continues to be listed in street directories at his home on Christian Street. In fact, as Philadelphia city death records indicate, all the Shankland brothers lived well into old age.

So, what happened to the *Mary Becket* and her captain? There are no reports of severe storms around Cuba at the time that the *Mary Becket* was lost. However, there definitely was a strong resurgence of pirate activity in early 1829, spurred on by the fact that during the previous year the U.S. Navy had stopped patrolling the area against pirates. A number of American ships in the Cuba trade reported sighting pirates or being boarded by pirate ships at just about the time that Sandgran and the *Mary Becket* were making their way home from Cuba.

Some of the actions by the pirates seem to have been taken out of sheer villainy. A French warship came into Havana harbor on



Havana harbor in the mid-19th century.

"Habana. 2a Vista tomada desde Casa-Blanca" by B. May & Co, Berlin (1853).

March 29, for example, with the report of having found the brig *Charlotte*, from Portland, Me., with the crew members nailed to the deck, all dead, though the cargo of the vessel was still intact. Around the same time, a Spanish government schooner arrived in Havana with a pirate schooner she had captured after a battle. One person who had been captured said that he had been forced to join the pirates after the rest of the crew of his vessel had been murdered. During his cruise, the man said, some 115 people had been killed by the pirates.

About eight days before Sandgran left Cuba, the brig *New Priscilla*, commanded by Capt. Hart from Salem, Mass., was sighted being preyed upon by a pirate ship off the Florida keys. When the brig *Scion* approached them, the pirate schooner sailed off, leaving the *New Priscilla* with no signs of life. Later, another mariner, Captain Kemp of the brig *Industry*, was brave enough to climb aboard the *New Priscilla*. He found utter destruction on the deserted vessel — rigging cut, sails shattered, bags of rice scattered on the deck, lockers and a chest broken open.

According to the *Essex Register* newspaper, people also found on the *New Priscilla*, "a boy of Salem, just a lad in his teens, spiked to the deck."

Another well-publicized act of piracy took place a couple of weeks later to the Boston brig *Attentive*, which had sailed from Matanzas, Cuba, on Feb. 22, 1829. About eight hours after sailing, she was taken by a pirate schooner. The entire crew was murdered except the second mate, Alfred Hill, who had con-

cealed himself in the hold. Hill reported later that after capturing the crew, the pirates called them onto the deck one by one. From his hiding place, he distinctly overheard the captain say, "Lord have mercy on my soul." He then heard a scuffling on the deck, and groans of pain. After the noise had ceased, the pirates searched throughout the vessel — he supposed for money. Around 4 in the afternoon, they knocked out the porthole in the bow of the vessel, which allowed it to fill with water, and then they left.

Hill remained hidden until twilight, and then crept up to the deck and saw that the pirates had fled. He tried to stop up the porthole with blankets, but the sea kept washing them away. He then filled the top sails to try to get the *Attentive* back to the harbor, but she had drawn too much water and sank while still over three miles from shore. He managed to grab a plank and to paddle toward land, landing on the beach about 4 a.m. the following morning. He soon made his way to a house and to safety.

And so, with dozens of pirate attacks taking place at the time and place where the *Mary Becket* was sailing, there is a fair chance that Capt. Sandgran was killed in a battle with pirates, but it is questionable why the Shankland brothers survived and he didn't. It will take more investigation to ascertain the truth. The Sandgran children are buried in the Gloria Dei churchyard, as are their grandparents, George and Anne Mitchell, and their mother Sarah, while a stone stands for their father, Capt. Charles, who never came home. 

# PIRATES IN PHILADELPHIA

By Michael Schreiber



*Morro Castle at the entrance to Havana Harbor.*  
"Morro y entrada Puerto de la Habana" by B. May & Co, Berlin (1855).

In the previous article, we discussed Capt. Charles Sandgran and raised the strong possibility that he might have died in a battle with pirates off the coast of Cuba. Another sea captain with a connection to Gloria Dei who encountered a pirate in the same region was Capt. Oliver Brooks. But unlike Sandgran, Brooks lived to tell the tale.

In the early 19th century, the West Indies was infected with pirates, and a swarm of them used Cuba as a base. Jean Lafitte was the most famous of the group, working in conjunction with the one-eyed American pirate William Mitchell. Another notorious cutthroat working out of Cuba, known for his violence, was called Diabolito; he was killed in a bay on the coast of Cuba in 1823 by the U.S. Navy's "Mosquito Fleet," which had been sent to help curtail piracy in the region.

Oliver Brooks had an initial run-in with pirates in November 1819, when a raider named Bervasto and his men boarded his brig, the *Elizabeth Ann*, near Cuba. Around the same time, another Philadelphia mariner, Capt. Martin of the schooner *Bee*, said that Bervasto had also boarded his vessel and "politely opened the main hatchway and took out 4 bbls of flour and 4 bbls of potatoes, and then genteely left him" (*Philadelphia Gazette*, Dec. 23, 1819).

In November 1822, Oliver Brooks was walking in a Havana street, when he met a pirate captain in the act of acquiring material to fit out his ship. Brooks and the outlaw recognized each other because, some years earlier, Brooks had caught him in the

midst of a raid and had turned him over to the authorities — who clapped him in irons.

So when they met years later in the street, the pirate declared to Capt. Brooks that he would get his revenge. He blockaded Havana harbor with his pirate schooner, which had 70 men aboard. From Morro Castle, at the entrance to the harbor, the vessel was clearly visible, lurking just off the coast. The pirate sent word that he was lying in wait for Brooks, and would pursue him even up to the Delaware River if need be.

After several days, Brooks was able to sail safely from the harbor while guarded by a special convoy provided by the Spanish General of Marines, and he returned to Philadelphia with the *Elizabeth Ann*. Four years later, his wife, Eleanora, died at age 28, and was buried here in the Gloria Dei churchyard.

Oliver Brooks lived until 1848, and was interred at the old Ronaldson's Cemetery at Ninth and Bainbridge, where the bodies of his second wife Sarah and the rest of their family also rested until the land was converted into a playground in the early 1950s.

## BURIED TREASURE IN PHILADELPHIA?

Pirates during the early 19th century, just as today, were often considered in the public eye as romantic heroes — living the kind of free and adventurous life that others could never experience. Bookstalls sold piles of potboilers about the exploits, real and imagined, of these swashbucklers of the sea.



"The pirates' ruse luring a merchantman in the olden days" (c.1896). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

John Fanning Watson, in his "Annals of Philadelphia," published in the 1820s with subsequent enlarged editions until 1844, wrote about the driving interest of many residents of this city in finding buried treasure supposedly left by the pirates of more ancient times. Parties roamed the areas along the Delaware with spades and shovels, trying to find chests of gold allegedly left by Captain Kidd and Blackbeard and other buccaneers.

Watson wrote in the 1844 edition, for example, of a discovery of treasure in the neighborhood of Gloria Dei, "at the southernmost end of Front Street." The famous patriot of the American Revolution, Timothy Matlack, then in his old age, told Watson that he had been shown an oak tree at the site, on which the letters KLP were carved. Matlack told him that he saw the stone that had covered the treasure at the home of the alleged finder. Supposedly, the man had been directed to the treasure by a sailor or in a hospital in England.

Watson also wrote that several people had confirmed for him that "at the Sign of the Cock in Spruce St., about 35 years ago, there was found in a pot in the cellar a sum of money of about \$5000." (The tavern called The Sign of the Cock was situated in an old wooden building on the south side of Spruce St., two doors east of Front St.)

Even a century earlier, in 1729, Benjamin Franklin had written, "This odd humor of digging for money, through a belief that much has been hid by pirates formerly frequenting the river, has for several years been mighty prevalent among us insomuch that you can hardly walk half a mile out of the town on any side, without observing several pits dug with that design, and perhaps some lately opened."

## HIJACKING OF THE SUSQUEHANNA

In 1837, these romantic preoccupations with the buccaneers had an influence on public opinion when word came to Philadelphia that the *Susquehanna*, a packet ship to Liverpool, had been hijacked by pirates off the capes of the Delaware.

The *Susquehanna* was the luxury liner, the QE2 of her day, with many wealthy Philadelphians on board and a hundred more in steerage. The company that booked her promised that she would leave port promptly on the 20th of every second month for Liverpool. Moreover, the ship was towed down the Delaware by a steamship, enabling her to reach the open sea on the same day that she left port.

On Oct. 20, 1837, after the pilot boat had left the *Susquehanna* at the mouth of Delaware Bay, the pilots managed to observe the ship approached by a low-slung schooner, painted all black, and bristling with men. They watched the schooner come abreast of the *Susquehanna* and perceived that men seemed to be boarding her. The pilots returned to dock and the news soon spread to Philadelphia and up and down the East Coast about the raid on the *Susquehanna* by piracy.

Ships were quickly launched from Philadelphia, from New York, and from the Chesapeake to search for the marauders, fearing that they had kidnapped some of the notable passengers and stolen the gold that was rumored to have been aboard. The U.S. Navy also joined the search.

Newspapers in Philadelphia and around the country ran the headline, "Audacious piracy!" and for the next month featured articles on the nefarious affair. Rumors were the meat of many of the articles. Some people recalled seeing Jean Lafitte's former

confederate, the notorious pirate and killer William Mitchell, on the streets of Philadelphia; others said that he appeared to be fitting out a black-colored schooner. That rumor turned out to be largely true. Mitchell had been in prison in Philadelphia on charges by one of his wives of bigamy, but he was not released until June 23, 1837, a month after the reported attack on the *Susquehanna*.

Two days after the attack, a columnist named JUNIUS wrote the following in the *National Gazette*: “The bold and audacious capture of this noble packet, almost within sight of our very doors, has thrown the community into a state of excitement not to be conceived by those at a distance.

“I ask the American people — I ask our distressed and sympathizing community — to hear me, when I assert, and I hope to prove to them, that this distressing event is owing to the negligence and inefficiency of one of the President’s Cabinet ... the Secretary of the Navy.

“Would such an event have occurred on the coast of Great Britain, France, the Mediterranean, or on any part of the coast of Europe? I will answer no; their cruisers are out attending to their duties.”

It wasn’t long, however, before a couple of vessels had arrived in U.S. ports that reported having sighted the *Susquehanna* at sea. They said that all seemed well with the famous ship. Even then, however, many refused to believe that the report of the pirate attack had been bogus. The news came from Maryland that people had sighted the timbers of a ship washed up on a beach, and it was suggested that it was perhaps the remains of the doomed *Susquehanna*.

Nevertheless, reports eventually got back to Philadelphia that the *Susquehanna* had docked in Liverpool right on schedule, and all the passengers were safe and oblivious to the panic that had arisen on their behalf in the States. A month later, when the *Susquehanna* returned to its homeport, the story came out about what had taken place in October. The black schooner, the captain related, had belonged to fishermen who were selling fresh-caught shellfish, and the steward had loaded crates of the delicacies on board in order to stock up his larder for the voyage.

A columnist for one of the Philadelphia newspapers summed up the affair by remarking, perhaps remorsefully, that the days of Blackbeard, Captain Kidd, and other buccaneers was long gone.

## BLACKBEARD IN PHILADELPHIA

Of course, a century earlier, when the city of Philadelphia was quite young, pirates not unlike those of Treasure Island were a relatively common sight right off our coast.

Edward Teach or Thatch, better known as Blackbeard, appeared in these parts in the summer of 1717. Blackbeard reportedly had visited Philadelphia two years earlier as a mate and was said by some to have a wife and family here. It was rumored that Blackbeard was known in the taverns of the Philadelphia waterfront, and frequented a tavern run by a Swedish woman down in Marcus Hook.

In the autumn of 1717, Blackbeard captured a 16-gun French slave ship that he dubbed *Queen Anne's Revenge* and converted into the lead ship of his pirate fleet. The Philadelphia mayor at the time, Jonathan Dickinson, mentioned a vessel belonging to Blackbeard with a similar name.



*Edward Teach, called Blackbeard, was said to have spent time in Philadelphia.*  
*'Blackbeard the Pirate'* attributed to James Basire (c. 1726).

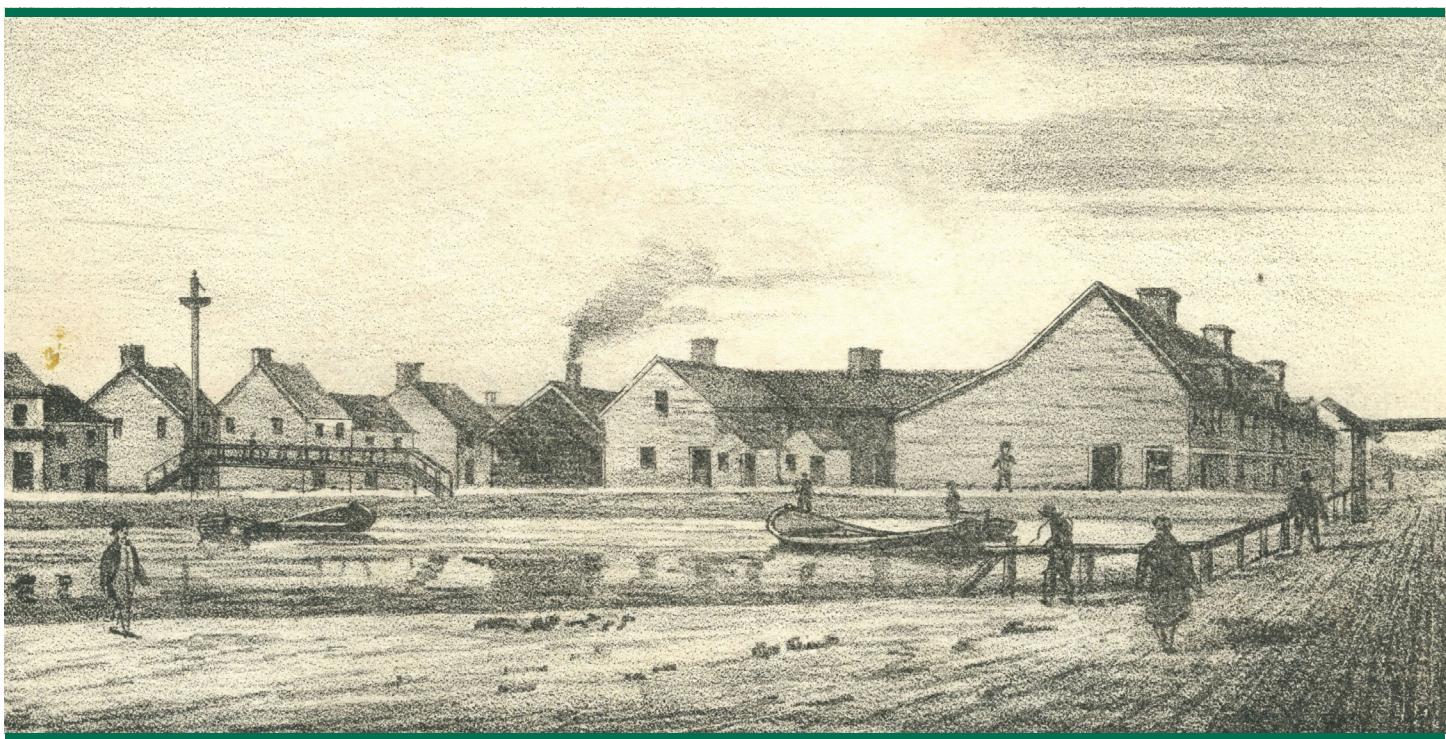
Dickinson spoke about Blackbeard in a couple of letters on file at the Pennsylvania Historical Society. Dickinson's own son, Joseph, had witnessed an attack by Blackbeard off Cape May. On Oct. 21, 1717, Dickinson wrote that the pirate was “yet at our capes, plundering all that comes, cutting away their masts, and letting them dive ashore.” Dickinson said that, based on the report of his son and others, Blackbeard had spared one ship, which contained passengers, but in general, the river was completely blocked up.

By that time, Blackbeard had seized six or seven ships in Delaware Bay, according to James Logan, who succeeded Dickinson as mayor, in a letter to the governors of New York and New Jersey that warned them to be on guard.

Around the same time, the *Boston News-letter* carried an article based on accounts of Blackbeard's pirate attacks outside Delaware Bay. The article described how Blackbeard took several vessels coming inbound, including one that had come from Liverpool and Dublin with about 150 passengers, including many indentured servants. The pirates threw the entire cargo of the ship overboard, except for a few articles that they fancied.

Then the pirates captured two snows that were headed outbound. One was commanded by William Spafford (who many years later built the large house that still stands on the northwest corner of Front and Bainbridge St. and is slowly being renovated). Spafford was carrying barrel staves for Ireland, while the second snow, the *Sea Nymph*, carried wheat for Portugal. The pirates threw all the wheat into the ocean and converted the *Sea Nymph* into a pirate ship, while putting all of the passengers onto Spafford's vessel — after having dumped the barrel staves into the sea. The following year, Blackbeard was killed in a battle off the coast of North Carolina, and his severed head was displayed on a pole.

Nearly 300 years later, in 1996, researchers discovered a ship-



Aspiring privateers could enlist at the tavern formerly known as the Blue Anchor on Dock Creek.  
"Dock Creek and Blue Anchor Inn" by William L. Breton (1830). Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia.

wreck in North Carolina, which after intense archaeological examination, is thought to be the remains of Blackbeard's *Queen Anne's Revenge*. Over 250,000 artifacts have been found in the wreck, including 31 cannons, two anchors, pages of a book that were used as wadding in a cannon, and small ceramic and metal objects like spoons and one coin made of brass — but no chests full of pirates' gold so far.

And further investigation has also been done on the life of Blackbeard himself. It is thought by some researchers that Blackbeard turned to piracy after having served as a privateer in the Caribbean during Queen Anne's War, which ended in 1714.

In 2015, historian Gaylus Brooks, under the auspices of the North Carolina Office of Archives and History, found evidence that seems to counter much of the bloodthirsty villainy that has been attributed to the pirate. Records suggest that Blackbeard, Edward Teach, was an educated aristocrat whose family owned a slave plantation in Jamaica, and likely the grandson of an Anglican minister. Brooks blames many of the lurid tales about Blackbeard to a book about him, written by a man named Nathaniel Mist and called "A General History of the Robberies and Murder of the Most Notorious Pyrates," which was published in 1724, six years after Blackbeard was killed.

## PROTECTION FOR THE CITY

After Britain and France declared war on each other once again, in 1743, French privateers — who operated similarly to pirates but with governmental backing — found good hunting grounds in Delaware Bay. A favorite trick was to run up English colors, and then signal for a pilot. They then captured the pilot and his boat, and when other vessels entered the bay, the privateers would approach them in the innocent looking pilot boat, which made them easy prey.

But Philadelphia captains soon outfitted their own privateer-

ing vessels. Two of them, the ship *Pandour* and the brigantine *George*, went to sea in 1743, and aspiring crew members were told that they could sign up at the tavern called the Sign of the Boatswain and Call, which was originally called the Blue Anchor, possibly the oldest building in Philadelphia. It was located at the corner of what is now Front and Dock Streets, where the Marriott wants to build a new 30-story tower. I imagine that the archaeological diggings at the site might be extremely interesting.

In May 1748, a Spanish brigantine, the *St. Michael*, with a crew of 160 men and carrying 34 guns, entered Delaware Bay and proceeded up river in order to capture a large merchantman that they had sighted and to loot and burn the town of New Castle. Fortunately, an English seaman named George Proctor, who had been impressed onto the *St. Michael* in Havana, escaped during the night and after much difficulty, succeeded in convincing the authorities in New Castle that the brigantine, which had put up English colors, was really a Spanish privateer. Proctor later told the Pennsylvania Provincial Council that "the Spanish Captain is of a savage, barbarous disposition, & declared frequently that he wou'd rob, plunder, & burn whatever he cou'd."

However, after she was fired upon by people in New Castle and by an armed merchantman in the river, the *St. Michael* retreated.

In the meantime, the alarm had gone up to Philadelphia that the city was in danger of attack. The British had sent a sloop of war, the *Otter*, to combat the privateers, but the ship required repairs and was unseaworthy. The captain then suggested that the *Otter's* cannons be removed and placed in shore batteries to protect Philadelphia. The smaller of the two batteries was placed on Society Hill at Lombard St., while the principle one, later called "The Old Fort," was located on high ground just south of this church, near what is now Washington Avenue.

# LOST ON THE PILOT BOAT ENOCH TURLEY

By Michael Schreiber



"Sailor with Binoculars" by Martin Aagaard (unknown).

For close to three centuries, experienced pilots have guided seagoing vessels through the treacherous waters of the Delaware River and Bay. In the very early days, merchant vessels often relied on Native American pilots from the area of the Delaware capes. By the mid-18th century, however, piloting had become established as a trade; initiates had to undertake training and apprenticeship for four years, and then pass an examination, in order to be admitted to the pilots' ranks.

Currents were unpredictable in those waters, and storms could sweep in with little warning. Delaware Bay contained numerous shoals and constricted channels, while the unbroken ocean shore south of Cape Henlopen gave no refuge for larger vessels until the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, 130 miles away. Pilot boats were often called upon to rescue mariners who had been caught in storms and winter ice.

Despite the dangers, pilots had to scramble to make a living for their families. By the late 18th century, Delaware Bay pilots had schooners that were large enough to cruise into the Atlantic in search of incoming vessels that might require their services. But the time between jobs still meant that the pilots often had a difficult time bringing in enough cash for their families.

In 1792, the pilots felt they had organized sufficiently as a

group to be able to withhold their labor in a strike for higher fees. The Philadelphia merchants attempted to break the strike by advertising in the local newspapers for scabs, while the Port Wardens revoked the licenses of the strikers. But the menace to shipping was too great and the organized pilots soon got a raise.

Almost a century later, in 1881, a bill was passed in the Pennsylvania Assembly that severely watered down an earlier law (1866) dealing with the remuneration of Delaware pilots. Philadelphia pilot Lester D. Schellenger wrote a letter of protest to the *Harrisburg Patriot* that appeared June 7, 1881. It was subtitled: "The Pilot Bill a Scheme to Make the Rich Richer and the Poor Poorer" and complained that the new law would compel pilots to pay one-third of their "hard earnings to support the steam tugs owned by wealthy houses and extensive associations."

Schellenger pointed out: "The law of 1866 allowed us pay at the rate of three dollars a day, after twenty-four hours when detained at the Breakwater waiting orders and full pilotage if the vessel went to another port than Philadelphia. This bill *allows us nothing* for detention, no matter how long that may be and then only half pilotage in case she goes to another port. *Is this just?* Should we be compelled to remain on the vessel without pay when we could be out cruising and trying to get other vessels?"



"The Irwin Lighthouse, Storm Raging" by James Wilson Carmichael (1851).

Lester D. Schellenger belonged to a large family of pilots. For generations, family members in Lewes, Del., and Cape May, N.J., as well as in Philadelphia, had followed the trade. Several men in the family were lost at sea, including Lester's brother William in 1839 and his brother Henry F. (Harry) in 1872.

## CHARLES AND ELIZABETH SCHELLINGER

Here we take a look at Charles D. Schellenger (either a brother or a cousin of Lester), who drowned off the Delaware capes in 1889. Charles worked from the pilot schooner *Enoch Turley*, which sank in a gale in April of that year. He is commemorated on a stone in the Gloria Dei churchyard along with his widow, Elizabeth Schellenger, who died in 1907.

Charles was born around 1831 in Philadelphia and probably lived as a child in the Southwark district. He apprenticed as a pilot while still in his teens. For most of the 1850s, he resided in Delaware, where he married Elizabeth Rowland. Elizabeth's father, David J. Rowland, was also a pilot; her mother, Catharine M. West Rowland (died 1860), came from a family of pilots.

The Rowlands lived in the seaside community of Rehoboth, Del., when Elizabeth was a small girl in the 1830s. Later, they moved a few miles north to Lewes, which lies just above Cape Henlopen on the Delaware Bay. Their house is now open to the public as a maritime museum. The museum has a coffee urn in its collection that was made for Charles D. Schellenger by friends. It also has a model of the pilot boat *Enoch Turley*, on which Schellenger lost his life.

The building is commonly known as the Cannonball House; it was a casualty of the British naval bombardment of Lewes in 1813, and a cannonball is still embedded in its foundations. Elizabeth's stepmother, Susan King Rowland, died on the premises in 1917, when a can of stove polish exploded in her kitchen.

While living in Lewes, the Schellengers had five children: the twins Henry F. and Henrietta F. (born 1852), David R. (1855, died in 1857), Charles Jr. (1857), and William (1860). During the Civil War, the family moved to Philadelphia, where they rented a house on Wharton St. In July 1863, Charles registered for the draft to serve in the Union Army. Two years later, in June 1865,

tragedy struck when their eight-year-old son, Charlie, died of scarlet fever — an epidemic among small children in those years. He is buried in the Gloria Dei churchyard.

In the 1870s, the family lived at various addresses close to the Philadelphia southern waterfront. Their teenage son Henry F. (Harry) followed the family trade and apprenticed as a pilot boy during the early years of the decade. Around 1880, they moved to a recently built brick house at 140 Mary St. (today League St.), which is still standing.

## "SKIMMED THE WATER LIKE A BIRD"

The pilot boat *Enoch Turley* was a small schooner, 70 feet in length, with 12 berths in her cabin, and two masts. She was named in honor of a Philadelphian who was esteemed as a sea captain in the early 19th century and died suddenly at age 39 in 1823. His son (born 1810), also named Enoch Turley, carried on as a sea captain, was appointed harbormaster for the port of Philadelphia (1856), and later served as president of the Society for the Relief of Poor Shipmasters.

The *Enoch Turley* was built in Baltimore and launched on the Delaware in 1842. The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* (Nov. 25, 1842) reported, "The new pilot boat 'Enoch Turley,' Capt. William Baker, was tried yesterday afternoon for the first time. She is a beautiful craft; was full dress with every rag she could carry, and skimmed the water like a bird. A large party were on board of her, who were elegantly entertained by the captain."

In the spring of 1843, the *Turley* was entered in a race with another pilot boat, the *John G. Whilder*. The racecourse was from Philadelphia all the way to the breakwater at the Delaware capes. In late November of that year, however, the *Turley* was blown ashore in a heavy wind off Indian River Inlet. It was feared that she was a total wreck, but with some difficulty, she was raised and her keel was rebuilt.

Back in service, in September 1844, the *Enoch Turley* raced the pilot boat *Herald*. The *Public Ledger* reported on Sept. 12 that the boats "left Southwark this morning, crowded with ladies, for a race and excursion, the stake being a sumptuous repast for all hands, to be paid for by the losing boat."

Throughout the 1840s, the *Enoch Turley* continued to carry pleasure-seekers on excursions as far as Newport, R.I. However, the hard-working schooner also performed a number of crucial rescues of disabled vessels. U.S. Coast Guard records mention, for example, that the *Turley* helped to tow the coast survey brig *Washington* following the hurricane of Sept. 8, 1846. In November 1846, the pilot boat rescued the brig *Carleton*, which had become disabled in a storm off the capes, and towed her to Reedy Island in the Delaware. In September 1847, she aided in the rescue of the *Flora del Mar*.

The *Turley* was rebuilt in Wilmington in 1862, and continued her heroic life-saving work through out the next two decades. Several weeks after the *Turley* disappeared at sea, the *Delaware Gazette & State Journal* (May 2, 1889) reminisced: "She has always been considered an able and safe boat and a favorite among Delaware pilots all through her long and useful career."

Able though she might have been, some evidently thought that the *Enoch Turley* was hexed. On May 22, 1889, The *Philadelphia Inquirer* commented: "The old boat was looked upon as particularly unlucky for the last three years, as she has been ashore several times and otherwise in trouble, and on that ac-

count the pilots were a little afraid of her."

But the pilot boat's owners discounted any talk of unluckiness. One of the owners, Capt. Harry Long, a pilot himself, told *The Inquirer* (April 13, 1889) that, although very old, "the *Turley* was well found and capable of standing any type of weather. She weathered the great gale of November 1888 in gallant style."

The year 1888 was indeed grueling for the Delaware Bay pilots and their crafts. The United States Life Saving Service's annual report for 1889 recounted their heroic actions during the extreme cold and blizzard conditions in March and April of the previous year. The *Enoch Turley* played a role in the rescues, but encountered her own perils. Before dawn on March 5, one of her pilots, John West, fell into the icy water as he was climbing onto the deck of the steamship *Indiana*. He remained in the water for half an hour, until he was found floating half a mile away unconscious. A few days later, it was reported, he had almost recovered.

A little more than a week later, on the morning of March 12, a tremendous storm and blizzard roared into Delaware Bay. Two dozen vessels were wrecked, and crew members and passengers were swept into the sea. The *Enoch Turley* became snagged on a shoal near the Lewes breakwater, where she lost her masts. But the boat and her men emerged relatively unscathed due to a timely rescue operation.

The Life Saving Service's report (p. 238) stated that the *Turley* "had dragged ashore at 8 o'clock in the morning and was lying about seventy-five yards off the beach, with the heavy seas washing over her. The life-savers succeeded in firing a line to her, and after some difficulty, occasioned by the vessel's crew being so benumbed with cold that they could not readily handle the gear, the whip and hawser were got in working order and all hands, numbering seven, were safely landed, one at a time, in the breeches-buoy. The rescue was a timely one, as the men were nearly used up from the severe exposure to which they had been subjected for several hours."

On Nov. 26, 1888, while cruising off the capes, the *Turley* encountered the "great gale" that Long spoke of, coupled with a heavy snowstorm. She was blown far south, but was able to find harbor at Fortress Monroe, Va., at the mouth of the Chesapeake, without serious damage.

## SWEPT AWAY IN THE GALE

Just over four months later, a far more powerful gale struck the coast. This one led to the demise of the *Enoch Turley* and the death of Charles D. Schellenger and nine other men who were aboard her. The storm began on Saturday, April 6, and continued into Sunday. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that in the aftermath, Rehoboth, the former home of Elizabeth Schellenger, looked like "the ruins of some ancient city." The boardwalk had washed away, and the pavilion that used to stand at the foot of Rehoboth Avenue had blown down.

As usual in such circumstances, the *Enoch Turley* went to sea in search of vessels that might need assistance in the storm. It appears, however, that the pilot boat was blown toward the south — just as happened the previous November. The pilot boat *Edwards* sighted her off Fenwick Island light (about 60 miles south of the cape). And *The Inquirer* later reported, "The last seen of the missing vessel was on the night of Saturday, April 6, when the bark *Wyho* passed her and reported her as scudding



*Delaware Bay pilots participated in rescues of this nature.*

for Hampton Roads."

A search was made for the missing vessel, but nothing was found. The captain of a schooner from Wilmington reported that on April 13 he had spotted a damaged boat that he was "pretty sure" was the *Turley*. On April 19, the *Wilmington Evening Journal* said that a sunken vessel had been discovered off Cape Charles and "in all probability the wreck was that of the *Turley*, as she was steering in that direction when she was last seen." Contradictory reports of other wrecks that "might have been the *Turley*" continued to appear for a couple of weeks more.

Finally, on April 26, the *Turley*'s co-owner Capt. Harry Long was quoted in *The Inquirer* as stating: "I think it may be assumed that the *Turley* has gone down, and the chance of any one of the crew being picked up is a very remote one."

Besides Schellenger, the dead included pilots John S. Kelly, Morgan Saunders, Henry M. Parker, and James A. Orton. Also lost were crew members E.W. Donaldson (or Danielson), Fred Greenwood, Juber Havilon (the cook), Alfred Allen (a Black man), and an English boy, Charles Young. A fund was taken up for the widows and children.

The legend persists even today that on stormy nights over the Atlantic, the ghostly shape of the *Enoch Turley* can be seen, trying to make its way back to the breakwater and safety. But rather than leave our readers on that gloomy note, we will recount the adventures of a happier day, when the *Turley* was in her prime.

An account in the *Philadelphia Press* (Aug. 28, 1866) described a voyage on the pilot boat: "On the morning of the 16th instant, the pilot-boat *Enoch Turley* road at anchor a short distance from the beach at Cape May. Graceful as a waterfowl she rose upon each wave like a thing of life ... She is one of the five pilot-boats owned by the pilots of Delaware Bay, men who at all seasons of the year, without regard to storm or weather, cruise off the mouth of the bay to furnish a pilot to every vessel seeking the port of Philadelphia. A more hardy, industrious, temperate, and worthy set of men do not live than these pilots."

After touring Chesapeake Bay, the correspondent wrote: "Wind changing in our favor carried us flying before it down the bay and out to sea, and the *Enoch Turley* proved her speed and excellent sea-going qualities ... Noble little craft, and nobler men who commanded her! Are not her and their virtues forever inscribed on our memories?"

# THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE SS POET

*"Unfortunately, absolutely nothing has turned up, not an oil slick, a life jacket, a plank. Nothing."*

- Coast Guard Official (1980)

A plaque memorializing the missing seamen of the *SS Poet* hangs in Gloria Dei Church in Philadelphia. Lottie Zukier Fredette, a congregant, organizes an annual service to honor the crew of this ship. Her son, Hans, was among those lost at sea on that October 1980 voyage. In our second curated exhibit, we explore the mysterious disappearance of this vessel.

This free exhibit opens on Apr. 1, 2020 and closes on Oct. 31, 2020. It is presented inside the Gloria Dei Church sanctuary from *Tuesday through Sunday, 9 am to 4 pm*. Here are some highlights:

## OPERATIONAL HISTORY

How does a ship twice the length of a football field completely disappear? The answer may lie in its service history.



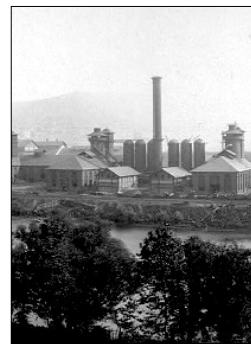
Photograph of Omar Bundy, courtesy of the Library of Congress.



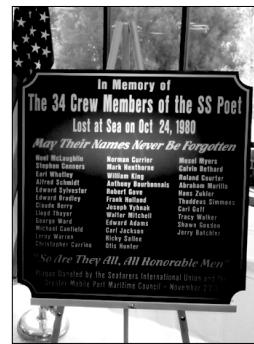
Officers gathered on the *General Omar Bundy* in 1945.



An aerial view of James River by Martin Norman (1990).



"The Bethlehem Steel plant" by William H. Rau (1896).



A plaque honoring the missing seamen of the *SS Poet*.

Originally named for distinguished serviceman **General Omar Bundy**, this trooper launched on Aug. 5, 1944 under a Maritime Commission contract.

The Bundy carried troops for the U.S. Navy during World War II. It was transferred to the Army in 1946, where it remained in active service for 3 years.

In 1949, the Bundy entered the Naval Defense Reserve Fleet. The ship was docked in the James River and remained moored there for the next 15 years.

In 1964, the **Bethlehem Steel Corp.** converted the vessel into a cargo ship. For the next 16 years, it carried cargo for different companies as the *SS Portmar* and *SS Port*.

The Hawaiian Eugenia Corp. purchased the ship in 1979 and renamed it the *SS Poet*. A year later, while on a routine voyage, the vessel vanished without a trace.

## AN UNSOLVED MYSTERY

It's been almost 40 years since the *Poet* disappeared. Here are some theories about what happened to it:

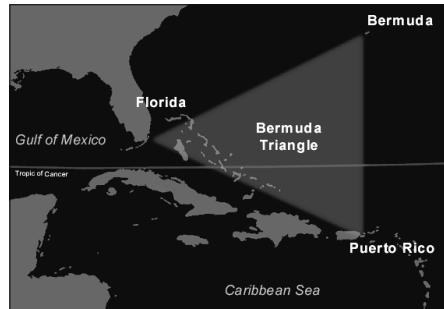
### *Crushed by Politics*



Portrait of President Reagan and Vice President Bush (1981).

The *Poet* was allegedly on a secret government mission on behalf of President Reagan. The crew was to deliver arms to Iran as part of a deal to free 52 U.S. hostages - but the operation failed.

### *Wrecked by a Storm*



Graphic showing the location of the Bermuda Triangle.

A major theory is that the *Poet* encountered an unexpected storm while sailing through the Bermuda Triangle. The ship is believed to have capsized, causing it to sink.

### *Marauded by Mobsters*



Mugshot of Carlo Gambino (c. 1930).

Scotland Yard reportedly received intelligence about an imminent attack by South Jersey mobsters. The Gambino family allegedly hijacked the vessel, sailed to Iran, and traded the ship and its cargo for heroin.

# WHY WE MAPPED OUR CHURCHYARD

By Amy Grant

*Now visitors with smartphones and tablets – or those who prefer paper – can locate their ancestors on our map and learn about them*

Benjamin Franklin once remarked, “Show me your cemeteries and I will tell you what kind of people you have.” What exactly did Franklin mean by this? Was this a statement meant to honor the lives of those we have buried? Or, was this directed at the living, who maintain their cemeteries or let them fall into ruins?

Let’s imagine that Franklin was about talking the deceased – such as those who are buried at Gloria Dei in Philadelphia. It is said that Franklin visited this church when he installed lightning rods on its steeple. This event likely occurred in 1752 when Philadelphia’s tallest structures were outfitted with grounded conductors. During this visit, Franklin probably noticed the *kind of people* buried in Gloria Dei’s churchyard. Some of their epitaphs are still readable today. Here are two examples:

*Here lyeth the  
body of Mary the  
wife of Andrew Robeson  
who dyed Novber ye 12, 1716  
Aged 50 years*

.....  
*Here lyeth ye body of  
Erick Gestenberg  
Who Dyed ye 8th of Janry  
1726 aged 65 years*



*Detail from the paper version of our "Churchyard Map and Self-Guided Tour." An alphabetical list of names of the interred appears on the back. Hard copies of this map are available for free to visitors (or please consider a free-will donation). The interactive version can be accessed on our website.*

Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') churchyard opened almost 30 years before Franklin's birth in 1706. Initially, it served as a burying ground for Swedish Lutheran settlers and their descendants. Over time, men, women and children who worked and lived near this church were also buried here. Some were veterans who fought in the American Revolution, War of 1812, the Civil War, and more recent battles such as World War II. Others were farmers, mariners, scientists, artists, merchants, bankers, composers, ministers, homemakers, students, and craftsmen. This churchyard has welcomed thousands of “permanent residents” during its 340 plus years of existence.

By the time Franklin died in 1790, the bucolic landscape that once surrounded Gloria Dei's churchyard had developed into a wharf town. The 19th century saw a massive development of adjacent land for commercial purposes. In 1967, an elevated freeway was built directly to the west, increasing vehicular traffic in the area. This industrialization had a devastating impact on the churchyard, explains historian Jeanette Woehr. “A lot of the graves you can’t read anymore because acid rain has ruined the marble.” As a result, visitors often have difficulty locating their ancestors’ gravestones.

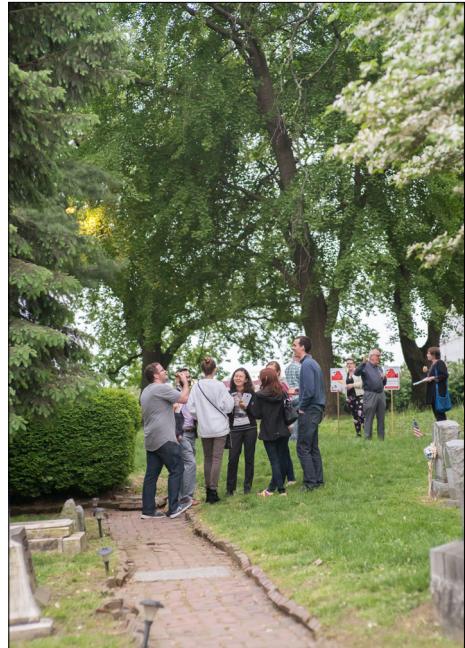
The Historic Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Preservation Corporation was formed in 2014 to help preserve and maintain the churchyard. Our first order of business involved assessing the conditions of the 540 gravestones that remain. The resulting report has helped us identify the markers in the worst shape and prioritize repairs.

What did we do about the tombstones that are no longer legible? We dug into our archives to identify them. After comparing several sources — an annotated plot map from the 1930s, various drafts of an inscription book dating to the 1870s, and several handwritten ledgers containing burial records — we were able to positively identify all but 16. We published these results in a comprehensive map that details plot numbers and the names of those interred. **Hardcopies of this map are available for free in a box mounted at the front of the church. Visitors with smartphones can access an interactive version of the map at [www.preserveoldswedes.org/features/explore-the-property](http://www.preserveoldswedes.org/features/explore-the-property).**

This map is merely the first phase in a long-term project to help visitors understand and interpret our historic churchyard. If Franklin's observation was intended for the living, I'd like to think that we are the *kind of people* he would be proud of.

# SPIRITS AND HISTORY

On May 3, 2019, we hosted our 4th Annual Spirits and History event at Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church. The event began in the churchyard, where guests were treated to stories about 8 artists who are memorialized here. Inside Riverside Hall, we heard a stellar performance by The Jazz Sanctuary, tasted delectable treats from 2 local chefs, entered a cork raffle in which everyone won, and sampled spirited tastings of beverages that would have been typical of the times. **Save the Date!** Our 5th Annual Spirits and History will take place on Friday, May 1, 2020 at 7:00 pm.



## MANY THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

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# 100 FOUNDING MEMBERS

## Supporting Our Foundation

This opportunity is for those who wish to support the Historic Gloria Dei Preservation Corporation and for those who wish to honor an important person in their life by making a gift in a loved one's name. The Historic Gloria Dei 100 Founding Lifetime Member program will be offered to the first 100 individuals who pay \$1,000 or pledge \$1,000, to be paid quarterly or monthly over 12 consecutive months. (There is still room to make this list!)

- Kristina Antoniades, MD
- Ann Blackstone
- Terry Brasko
- Margaret Sooy Bridwell
- Jerome Buescher
- Margaret Buescher
- Rev. Patricia Cashman
- Barbara Chilcott
- Jill M. D'Andrea
- Paul Fejko, Composer, Organist
- Amy Grant
- Paul Grant
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- Sandra Pfaff
- Christine Pickup
- *in honor of* Kathryn McQuiston Pickup
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- David E. Sandels
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- Wade Sjogren
- *in honor of* The Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Founding Lutheran Ministers (1730-1789): Johan Dylander, Gabriel Nasman, Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, Magnus Wrangel, Nils Collin
- The Swedish Colonial Society
- Margaretha Talerman
- Rev. Dr. Kim-Eric Williams
- Jeanette Woehr



**HGDP**C

Historic Gloria Dei (Old Swedes')  
Preservation Corporation

The Historic Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Preservation Corporation was established to fund, support, and supervise the restoration, renovation, and ongoing maintenance of the Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church buildings, grounds, and graveyard so that future generations may share in this historic and architectural treasure. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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